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5 April 1955

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MEMORANDUM FOR [REDACTED]

SUBJECT: Validity of Estimates

1. Attached are two supplements to subject ONE study dated August 1954, copies of which were circulated under cover of my memorandum for the IAC dated 3 December 1954.

2. The first supplement, on the USSR, updates the previous section and in some respects overlaps it. However, it was written to stress what we have said concerning changes in Soviet leadership since the passing of Stalin from the scene.

3. The second supplement, on Indochina, is a continuation of the previous text.

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SUPPLEMENT TO ONE STUDY: VALIDITY OF ESTIMATES

25 March 1955

USSR: Changes in Soviet Leadership Since the Death of Stalin

1. Since the death of Stalin in March 1953, the problem of Soviet leadership and the probable developments affecting it have been discussed in several NIE's including: SE-39, "Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin and of the Elevation of Malenkov to Leadership in the USSR" (12 March 1953); SE-42, "Current Communist Tactics" (24 April 1953); NIE-65, "Soviet Bloc Capabilities Through 1957" (16 June 1953); NIE-90, "Soviet Bloc Capabilities Through Mid-1955" (18 August 1953); NIE 11-5-54, "Soviet Capabilities and Main Lines of Policy Through Mid-1959" (7 June 1954); and NIE 11-4-54, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through Mid-1959" (14 September 1954).

2. In the above NIE's we have regularly assessed the indications of conflict within the top Soviet leadership and have consistently estimated that the problems raised by the succession to Stalin would probably continue unresolved for some time. However, because of the lack of firm prior evidence of any specific personnel changes, none of these estimates contain specific predictions as to the political fate of single personalities among the Soviet leaders. They made

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no predictions that Beria would be removed and executed or that Malenkov would be reduced in status. Despite numerous indications from time to time that relationships among the top Soviet leaders were shifting, intelligence has never had solid evidence of a kind that would permit it to make such estimates. We believe that in the nature of these events intelligence is unlikely ever to have such evidence. Such events are contingent; they result from the decisions of individuals who would not themselves be able to predict with certainty their own behavior in advance of the moment of decision. For the same reason intelligence is frequently unable to predict the fall of a French premier, even though the political factors involved in the event are almost entirely exposed to public view. In the case of the USSR, all decisions affecting personalities are taken within the small closed circle of the top Soviet leadership and are completely hidden from the view of intelligence.

3. Moreover, in our estimates we have attempted to focus on the specific developments and trends that were of major importance to US security interests. We have not regarded events like the fall of Beria and Malenkov as having such importance. Indeed, it has been one of our principal concerns in the NIE's to counter the belief that the fall of this or that Soviet leader would greatly alter or diminish the threat to US security interests. Instead we have attempted

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to ask and answer such questions as: Will a possible struggle for power among Stalin's successors affect the stability of the Soviet regime or its ability to make and carry out decisions? How will the relationships among the Soviet leaders affect Soviet policies? NIE 11-4-54 (Paragraphs 16-24) contains an extended discussion of the Soviet internal political situation and in particular of the implications of a contest for power among the highest leaders. It concludes with the following paragraph, which we believe addresses itself to the essential questions raised for US intelligence by shifts in the Soviet leadership:

"We believe, therefore, that the present Soviet regime is firmly in power and that it is unlikely to be dislodged either by a grouping of forces outside the top leadership or as the result of a struggle within it. Significant changes may take place in the composition of the ruling group or in the relative power positions of its members; one man may even succeed in gaining absolute power. We believe, however, that the new Soviet regime will be able to resolve such conflicts within the confines of the ruling group and the higher echelons of the Communist Party. Consequently, we believe that whatever conflicts for power or differences respecting policy may develop within the ruling group, they are unlikely to affect significantly the stability of the regime or its authority within the country, or to prevent it from making policy decisions and carrying them out. These policies and their implementation will continue to reflect the fundamental agreement which evidently obtains among the leaders concerning the basic objectives of the Communist regime."

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SUPPLEMENT TO ONE STUDY: VALIDITY OF ESTIMATES

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Indochina

The Effects of Certain Possible Developments in the Military Security and Political Stability of Laos and Cambodia through 1954 (SNIE 63-2-54, 9 June 1954) posits certain developments and assesses the probable consequences of these developments in Laos and Cambodia. For the most part, this estimate remains moot.

Post-Geneva Outlook in Indochina, NIE 53-5-54 (3 August 1954) examined the effect of the Geneva Agreements on the situation in Indochina and estimated both short-term developments and long-term trends. It is too early to make a final assessment of the longer-range estimates, and policy actions by the US have served to counter some of the adverse trends predicted in the paper. The estimate was gloomy with respect to Vietnam, stating that the Communists would consolidate control in the north with little difficulty and that the prospects for a strong government in non-Communist Vietnam were poor. So far, however, the Communists appear to be having some difficulties in the north and prospects in the South have improved, largely because of firm US support for Diem. The estimate correctly foresaw a growing Communist threat in Laos. Its conclusion that if adequate outside assistance is made available, the Cambodian Government will probably increase its effectiveness remains moot.

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Current Trends in South Vietnam (SNIE 63-6-54, 15 September 1954)

was largely concerned with the political crises occasioned by the insubordination of General Hinh. It estimated correctly that Premier Diem would probably survive these crises. It also stated that Diem was the only figure on the political scene who could gain genuine nationalist support but that Diem would be unsuccessful and the situation would continue to deteriorate in favor of the Communists unless the French gave an early and convincing demonstration of support for Diem. Diem still appears to be the only well-known Vietnamese figure with nationalist appeal; Diem's limited success since September 1954 would not have been possible if the French through General Ely had not given Diem some backing. We believe Diem would have made still greater progress if he had received the "convincing" demonstration of full French support posited above.

Probable Developments in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia through July 1956 (NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954) was a detailed analysis which superseded the several brief estimates discussed above. In many respects the longer term judgments of this paper, which continued to reflect pessimism over the future of Vietnam, cannot yet be evaluated. Although there has been some progress in building central government authority in South Vietnam and the Vietminh are encountering economic and political difficulties in the North, it is too early to evaluate the estimate that

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"it is highly unlikely that South Vietnam will develop the strength necessary to counter the growing Communist subversion within its borders." The NIE correctly foresaw continued Communist activities in northern Laos but it may have placed too much emphasis on Communist concern over Indian reactions as a moderator of such activities.

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